

John Chester Miller. *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery*. (New York: Meridian Books, 1980 [1977]) xiv, 312 pp., \$5.95.

During the past fifteen years a legion of scholars have turned their attention to the history of slavery and race relations in America. Mentioning such names as David Brion Davis, Eugene Genovese, Winthrop Jordan, Sterling Stuckey, Leon Litwack, Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, or Willie Lee Rose simply reminds us of how far scholarship has advanced since the early 1960s. A characteristic of this work has been to shift attention back from the mid-nineteenth century to earlier times and to view American slavery in its international setting. One conclusion has been to underscore the depth of North American racism even in the era of the Declaration of Independence. As John Hope Franklin put it in 1976, "For all its emphasis on natural equality and human liberty the ideology of the American revolution was not really egalitarian."

John Chester Miller's *The Wolf by the Ears* makes a solid contribution to this new trend in American historical writing. As a full-length study of the beliefs and actions of one of the most famous Founding Fathers, this volume reveals the ambiguities and contradictions of a whole generation's approach to race and slavery. In copious detail but with a judicious temper Miller documents the pervasive importance of these issues in the early years of the republic. Time after time race loomed large in Jefferson's consciousness and affected many of the most important choices he made. Almost invariable, as Miller shows, the Jefferson who privately claimed to abhor slavery either avoided taking a public stand against the institution or actually cast his lot with its defenders.

The main value of this book is in its comprehensiveness and readability. Students seeking methodological innovation or a transnational perspective will have to look elsewhere. David B. Davis's *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, for example, places Jefferson much more clearly within the framework of social class relations and imaginatively compares his circumstances with those of antislavery advocates in England and France. Miller is content with a more traditional life and times approach similar to the one he employed in his successful biographies of Samuel Adams (1936) and Alexander Hamilton (1959). In addition to covering familiar ground, *The Wolf by the Ears* records a lifetime of Jefferson's equivocation on such matters as manumission, slavery in the territories, relations with the black republic

of Haiti, and strategies of antislavery action.

Two aspects of the book stand out. Miller devotes the better part of three-and-a-half chapters to arguments against the claim, made most recently by Fawn Brodie in 1974, that Jefferson had sexual relations with his slave Sally Hemings. Miller rests his case on the improbability of such a liaison. Miller also stresses Jefferson's changing views over time. Although from his earliest days Jefferson contended that whites and blacks could not live together as free citizens in a multiracial society, a view that required sending the freed slaves to Africa or Latin America, he steadily grew more conservative. As Miller writes, "Jefferson began his career as a Virginian; he became an American; in his old age he was in the process of becoming a Southern nationalist."

Readers of *The Wolf by the Ears* will never be able to see Jefferson and slavery in quite the same light. They may sympathize with what Miller terms Jefferson's "harrowing sense of guilt" about slavery, but many may draw less charitable conclusions.

Roland L. Guyette
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